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AUTHOR Williams, Eddie
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ABSTRACT

The validity of the consensus paradigm dominant in sociolinguistics is questioned. Social scientists working in this paradigm take the perspective of society as an aggregate operating through agreement between its constituent elements, working to the benefit of the aggregate. The best-known of the consensus-oriented theories is structural-functionalism (S-F), which sees society as a system of mutually supportive institutions where each institution contributes to the system as a whole, maintaining it in equilibrium. By contrast, variant theories in the conflict paradigm see the S-F concept of society as a fundamental misrepresentation. It is proposed here that theories in the conflict paradigm are more powerful than those in a consensus paradigm because they account more comprehensively for observed phenomena in language use and learning. Further, language policies in education based on consensus theories are likely to be counterproductive for being based on invalid theories. The implication is that schools can do no more than the dominant group will allow: perpetuate structural conflict or promote assimilation. Schools can not transform dominated social groups into dominant groups. At best, schools can enhance an individual's capacity for mobility from one group to another. A society of groups with differential power coexisting in an integrated way without conflict is not possible. (MSE)

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A PARADIGM REGAINED: CONFLICT PERSPECTIVE ON LANGUAGE USE IN BILINGUAL EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXTS

Eddie Williams
(Centre for Applied Language Studies, University of Reading)

This paper is concerned with theory in that it questions the validity of the dominant paradigm in British and North American sociolinguistics. 'Paradigm' here refers to a particular research tradition which governs the way an academic community views its discipline, in terms of defining concepts, specifying methods and identifing problems that 'while the paradigm is taken for granted, can be assumed to have solutions. To a great extent, these are the only problems that the community will admit as scientific ... A paradigm can ... even insulate the community from those socially important problems that are not reducible to puzzle forms in terms of the conceptual ... tools the paradigm supplies' (Kuhn, 1970:37).

One of the advantages of a paradigm is that it generates theories; a related disadvantage alluded to by Kuhn is that the theories generated will be restricted to the concerns of that paradigm. The dominant paradigm in British and North American sociolinguistics and bilingual education in recent times has been the consensus paradigm, and this has resulted in defective theories of language use, and misguided policies in bilingual education. There is sufficient evidence to warrant serious consideration of an alternative paradigm, the conflict paradigm, which has had considerable influence in sociology, but has been relatively neglected by those working in sociolinguistics and bilingual education (among the exceptions are Brent-Palmer, 1979 and Paulston, 1980).

The Consensus Paradigm

Social scientists working in a consensus paradigm see society as an aggregate operating on the basis of agreement between its constituent elements, working to the benefit of the aggregate. The best-known of the consensus oriented theories is structural-functionalism (hereafter S-F). Briefly put, S-F sees society as a system of institutions which are mutually supportive and where each contributes to the system as a whole, thus maintaining it in a state of equilibrium. Its most ardent proponent in Britain was the social anthropologist Radcliffe-Brown (eg 1952), while in North America it has been exemplified in the work of Parsons (eg 1951). Structural-functionalists were particularly given to comparing society to a living organism (cf Radcliffe-Brown, 1952:12), where heart, lungs etc are the components, each serving a particular function, and each contributing to the maintenance of the organism as a whole. The function of culture, according to Radcliffe-Brown is to unite individuals into 'stable systems of groups determining and regulating the relation of these individuals to one another, and providing such external adaptation to the physical

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environment, and such internal adaptation between the component individuals or groups, as to make possible an ordered social life' (1931:13).

Two criticisms can be made of S-F theory. First the functions for social institutions and usages are attributed on an ad hoc basis. Fishman, for example, says 'no society needs or has two languages for the same function' (1976:110). So, if a society does have two languages, sociolinguists working within a consensus paradigm find two different functions for them (typically the functions adduced are concerned with marking formality or the lack of it). Likewise diglossia as a social institution would be functionally explained as promoting group solidarity through the overt realization of shared norms for language use.

The second criticism is that strict S-F cannot account for social change - if a society is in a state of equilibrium then there will simply be no motivation for change. Change in the S-F view is seen as the accommodation of dysfunctional elements, originating outside the system, leading to adaptation and a renewed condition of equilibrium by the remainder of the system. Periods when a society lacks consensus are seen as temporary. Fishman, for example, says that 'bilingualism without diglossia tends to be transitional' (1970:87). In short, the normal condition of society is seen as one of stability deriving from consensus.

The Conflict Paradigm

Variant theories in the conflict paradigm see the S-F concept of society as a benign system of self-regulating mechanisms as a fundamental misrepresentation. Classical marxist theory considers that conflict occurs in terms of socio-economic class; neo-marxist theory expands this to conflict of groups in terms of cultural values (cf Williams, 1982; Paulston, 1982). Society in a conflict paradigm is viewed not as a whole in a state of equilibrium with disequilibrium as a pathological condition, but as a system where conflict and contradiction is inherent. The metaphor is not that of a living organism, but rather of a stage where conflict is endlessly played out.

The Catalonian sociolinguist Ninyoles (1979:19) distinguishes three meanings of conflict in society: (i) in terms of opposition of interest (ii) in terms of opposing action (iii) in terms of violent and opposing action. The first meaning - opposition of interest - is a sufficient condition for the existence of conflict in society. Such hidden or structural conflict does not necessarily imply overt aggression or rebellion; these would be simply manifestations of opposing interests. Structural conflict can therefore be present in a society without members of the groups concerned being aware of it. This will typically be the case for dominant group members who may be surprised or perplexed when violent

minority group action occurs. On a human level individual majority group members may feel sympathy for the minority group. Indeed, in any given situation, observers tend to pass value judgements on groups; these judgements are not, of course, generated by the theory, which is value free in that it does not attribute worth or lack of it to any group.

The view to be put forward here is that theories in a conflict paradigm are more powerful than those in a consensus paradigm in that they account more comprehensively for observed phenomena in language use and language learning. Further, language policies in education which are based on consensus theories are likely to be counterproductive, since they are themselves based on invalid theories. There is nothing as dangerous as a bad theory.

Language Use

One of the most widely propagated theories for the alternate use of two languages in society is that of diglossia, used here to refer to the occurence of 'functionally differentiated varieties of whatever kind' (Fishman, 1970:74). The theory is clearly a structural-functional one, within the consensus paradigm. It says that there will be social consensus in the form of shared norms for use, so that all members of the society will know who speaks what to whom, where and when (cf Fishman, 1965). By following the norms, members of society are contributing to social solidarity.

If a group begins to break the norms, this is seen as a new development, rather than as the realisation of a conflict that was always present. As Blanc and Hamers point out (1983:212): 'a minority group is defined as such by the majority group ..... and is characterised by the fact that it lacks the power of decision over its own fate' (my translation). The minority or dominated group (I use the terms here without distinction) is powerless as regards language choice in cross group communication. Its language will tend to occur in domains where majority group members are absent, typically domains involving minority ingroup transactions (cf Brent-Palmer, 1979:156). The norms for use, in effect, are dictated by the majority group.

Obedience to norms, however, should not be mistaken for consensus, though it is so mistaken, particularly if maintained over a long period of time. When the relative socio-economic status of groups begins to change, however (cf Bourhis et al, 1979:163 for Belgium; Heller, 1982:109, for Québec), then the dominated group may reject the dominant group's language norms. Faced with this, the dominant group member may be puzzled. Thus Heller (1972:108) claims that 'Something strange is going on in Montréal. Every encounter between strangers has become a political act...the fact

that conversation often halts and negotiations often have to be made in explicit terms is evidence, I think, of the necessity of shared social knowledge and norms of language use in order for conversations to take place.' One sees her point. The question is, which group is to have the legitimising power over the norms? Which group, in other words, is to make the rules?

In similar vein Lambert (1979:186) regards it as one of the 'puzzling features of the world' that 'a new form of xenophobia has taken root, making it uncomfortable if not impossible for certain ethnolinguistic groups to live together harmoniously within a common social system ..... the underlying logic of this seems to be: we have our own unique culture and language and these give us distictive styles of personality and distinctive modes of thought. Today there is a warning attached: trespassers or potential eroders, beware!' Without being explicitly stated, notions of consensus underlie these sentiments. Lambert confesses himself puzzled and uncomfortable. But, one might ask, has everyone been comfortable up to now?

One connotation of 'comfort' is familiarity, originating in the absence of change. Diglossia, claims Ninyoles (1972:54), is basically a conservative theory: 'diglossic ideologies aim to stabilise as an ideal a situation which, in our view, lacks stability or equilibrium ..... Diglossic ideologies are, in our view, strictly conservative. They aim to perpetuate the status quo, and ignore, or categorically deny, the real disjunction: the dilemma between language shift or normalisation' (my translation). The dilemma referred to is between a 'language shift' to Castilian or 'normalisation' through use of Catalan in all domains in the Catalan areas. Far from being evidence of consensus, a diglossic situation indicates structural conflict, though it is only when this manifests itself as contrary action that majority group members become aware of it and feel puzzled and uncomfortable.

Education in Bilingual Contexts

At one extreme, education programmes in bilingual contexts may pay no attention to the child's home language whatsoever. The child is 'submerged' in the dominant language, which is used by the teachers and most of the child's peers. Programmes that are more child-centered may use the child's home language in the initial stages of education. Other programmes again may use the child's home language for certain subjects, or for certain parts of the day, or may even allow teachers to alternate languages in a subjective manner (cf Gaarder, 1978:37).

The role that is allocated to the minority and majority languages is, of course, a key issue. Fishman (1976:109) suggests organising the

programme to reflect the fact that 'languages are not functionally equal' adding that, 'the sociology of bilingual education must be concerned with the power differentials of language in the real world'. The purpose of bilingual education for Fishman however, is not simply to reflect social differences in the school, but to promote understanding. His view is that 'no society, not even those where bilingualism has been most widespread and most stable, raises its children with two mother tongues. There is always an "other" tongue ..... Nevertheless, the other tongue need not connote things foreign and fearful; indeed, given sufficient societal commitment in that direction, bilingual education can be a powerful assisting force on behalf of divesting the "other" tongue and the "other" group of its foreignness. That is exactly what bilingual education at its best is all about.' (1976:111). Fishman's plea for tolerance here is laudable, but his position takes for granted the maintenance of existing power relationships between groups.

A alternative view is that bilingual programmes should not attempt to mirror society in the manner suggested by Fishman, but rather give disproportionate prominence to the socially 'weaker' language. This (avoiding discussions of what is meant by "society") is the case of Welsh-medium schools in South Wales and French immersion programmes in Canada. Nonetheless, whatever the characteristics of particular programmes, one highly consistent finding from the considerable body of research that has been carried out (for reviews see Ogbu, 1978; Cummins, 1984) is that a home-school language switch results in 'high levels of functional bilingualism and academic achievement in middle class majority language children' yet leads to 'inadequate command of both first and second languages and poor academic achievement in many minority children' (Cummins, 1978 cited in Paulston, 1980:5; see also Cummins, 1986:22). In the case of minority group children, their participation in a bilingual programme (or a monolingual submersion programme) is generally not a matter of choice, but rather one of 'obligatory bilingualism' (cf Gaarder, 1978:34). Such is the situation of Finns in Sweden (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1976), Hispanic students in Texas (Ortiz and Yates, 1983) and Franco-Ontarians in Canada (Cummins, 1984). In all cases the groups demonstrate a relative lack of academic success.

One might attempt to explain these results by putting forward various linguistically oriented reasons: that pupils have had insufficient exposure to the target language; that they are competent, but in non-standard contact varieties (cf Brent-Palmer, 1979); that development in second language competence depends on previously attained competence in the first language (cf Cummins, 1979).

While there is doubtless an element of truth in these views, it is clear that they are based upon notions of deficiency in standard language, and the implied remedy is more instruction. This remedy proposes that,

since schools are failing in their function of ensuring adequate academic achievement, then compensation in terms of instruction is called for. Seen in terms of the consensus paradigm, the situation is that one of the component elements (the school) is not discharging its due function, and the consequence is lack of equity with the attendant possibility of disequilibrium in society. The education programme is seen as an independent variable that can be manipulated to determine the dependent aim of academic achievement and linguistic proficiency. However, research on Mexican-American and Puerto Rican students suggests that compensatory education is not successful with minority group students (Cummins, 1986:18).

Some educationalists claim that factors to do with 'culture specific pedagogy' (cf Adelman, 1981:265) rather than simply 'language' may account for the relative lack of academic success of minority students. Thus Philips (1972) points out that the classroom teaching and learning styles expected by 'ordinary' American teachers differ from those of their Oglala Sioux students, to the detriment of the latter, even though they are apparently fluent in English.

The issue that receives acknowledgement, but little more, in these language or culture oriented explanations is that of the power and status relations obtaining between the groups concerned. Clearly the dominant group, which controls institutions, will reflect its own preoccupations and legitimise its own values and practices within the formal education system in terms of content and method of teaching and especially of assessment. Educational systems are obviously concerned with cultural reproduction, but the culture they reproduce is that of the dominant group, not the culture of society as a whole. This will be the case whether we are talking in terms of social classes (cf Bourdieu: 1977), ethnic groups, or linguistic groups. Clearly children from the dominant group, or whose culture is close to the dominant group's, are at an advantage. Children from dominated groups, on the other hand, have to acquire a new variety of language, and new ways of behaving with that language, if they are to succeed in the major assessment procedures. One of the results claimed for this is that children from the dominated groups internalise the inferior status attributed to them by the dominant group (cf Cummins, 1986; Ogbu, 1978; Blanc and Hamers, 1982) and perform accordingly within the educational system.

Cummins (1986) suggests that this negative self-image can be corrected if practices in the school 'reverse' those that obtain in the society at large. Elements in such school practices would include incorporation of minority pupils' culture and language, participation of minority parents in the education of their children, and assessment procedures that do not 'blame' the learners. The type of educational programme envisaged by Cummins deliberately attempts not to reflect the

power and status relations of society, for otherwise 'schools will continue to reproduce ..... the power relations that characterise the wider society' (1986: 33).

Programmes of this kind are characterised not by notions of standard language or culture deficiency but rather by the notion of valorisation deficiency. Valorisation is concerned with demonstrating value through consistent and all-embracing use (see Blanc and Hamers, 1982). Cummins proposes that the education system should compensate for the inequality of society through practices (linguistic and cultural) that derive from the minority group. There are clearly problems in such attempts. These include the supply of appropriate teachers and materials; the reserves of commitment and sincerity required from these teachers (children quickly identify folkoric tokenism); and the treatment of majority group children. Furthermore, the independent variables in the 'valorisation deficiency' model are clearly located in the education system. We are still within a consensus paradigm, where compensation provided through the education system will, it is hoped, contribute to social equilibrium.

However, since the proposals made by Cummins are restricted to the school domain, it is difficult to see how they will affect the dominant/dominated power relationships, as claimed by Cummins, in any serious way, far less 'transform society by empowering minority students rather than reflect society by disabling them' (1986: 34). Cummins perceives social iniquities, but does not seem to regard society as a scene of inherent conflict. In the conflict paradigm it is axiomatic that dominant groups will not permit changes that threaten their own interests. Valorising minority languages and cultures within the school system does not represent a real threat, for the changes will be local, and confined to certain schools.

However, even if programmes that effectively valorise minority languages and cultures are locally successful then paradoxically the students emerging from them may be disempowered in a more subtle way. Tajfel (1970, cited in Lewis, 1981:216) suggests that education channelled towards ethnicity facilitates ethnocentrism. True, such students have not been 'taught their place' (Paulston, 1971: 413), nor taught that 'the stigma is deserved' (Hymes, 1971: 3). Quite the contrary; they have, assuming the success of the programme, attached a value to their language and culture that the wider society does not share.

Such students, when they leave school and have to make their way in wider society, respond to the disjunction betwen school and the 'real world' in different ways. One response is to detach themselves from the mainstream of society and pursue an independent existence in quasi-autonomous groups (cf Ogbu, 1978, cited in Cummins, 1986: 22). Such groups

are of course subject to tolerance from the majority group. Another response is to come to terms with the discrepancy between their school experience and the 'real world', and assimilate into the majority group (clearly children can come into contact with the 'real world' while attending school, and some will assimilate to the dominant group while at school; to the extent that this happens, then the valorisation programme has failed). A third, more confrontational response is for individuals to resort to opposing action which might be non-violent (eg using the minority language in majority language domains) or violent (eg rebellion or uprising).

Reasons as to why the third violent response is not an inevitable occurrence are various: the dominated group may perceive itself as too weak; it may favour assimilation; above all, and especially in modern urban societies, the relative absence of sustained and coherent group violence is to do with the problematic question, 'when is a group a group?' Without entering into detail, we may note that groups are rarely separated from each other along all possible lines of cleavage (language, ethnicity, religion, occupation, location of residence etc). Individuals within the dominated group will have relationships with individuals from the dominant group which cross-cut the lines of group cleavage. This may affect the ethnolinguistic vitality (see Giles et al, 1977; Johnson et al, 1983) of the dominated group, and also the intensity of the individual's allegiance to the group. An individual's interest as a member of a dominated group is balanced against their interest in the dominant group. It is not realistic to expect members of dominated groups to maintain their cultural boundaries at the price of socio-economic mobility (cf Fishman, 1983). Such networking tends to work towards the assimilation of dominated groups.

Conclusion

If we accept that groups as a whole do not consent to practices contrary to their own interest, then the consensus based structural-functional theory of society is untenable. Powerless groups may have to accept or acquiesce to their language being excluded from prestigious social domains, and being used less significantly in schooling. However, acceptance or acquiescence do not constitute consent. To the extent that consent occurs, then it indicates willingness to assimilate, and assimilation is no more than a response to conflict.

It follows that if we reject the consensus-based structural-functional theory of society, then the view that schools can fulfill a function in the social structure to maintain consensus is patently baseless. If schools reflect inter-group power relations in their language practices then the minority language will be accorded an insignificant role which will accelate its rate of disuse; on the other hand, if schools reverse inter-group power relations, then they risk exacerbating conflict.

In effect, schools can do no more than the dominant group will allow - they can perpetuate structural conflict, or promote assimilation. These are both eventualities that powerful dominant groups can face with equanimity. (On an individual level, schools can also attempt to promote inter-group tolerance, with a view to preventing conflict of interest from developing into violence.) What schools alone cannot do, expressed in the starkest terms, is to tranform dominated groups into dominant groups. At best they can enhance an individual's capacity for mobility from one group into another. A failure to appreciate the limited possibilities of educational systems to affect inter-group power relations can give rise to impossible expectations of educational policies.

Faced with language and educational practices which are in conflict with their own, the courses open to dominated groups are to attempt one (or a combination of) the following: self-imposed segregation; assimilation; replacing the dominant group and becoming dominant themselves. The utopia of a society composed of groups with differential power coexisting in an integrated fashion without conflict is precluded: dominant groups do not act counter to their own interest, and the education system can only be expected to perpetuate their hegemony.

This bleak conclusion is one that I take no pleasure in. However, I see no ready solution. Solutions, after all, are for problems. We have been considering conflicts, and for conflicts there are no solutions, but simply outcomes.

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